

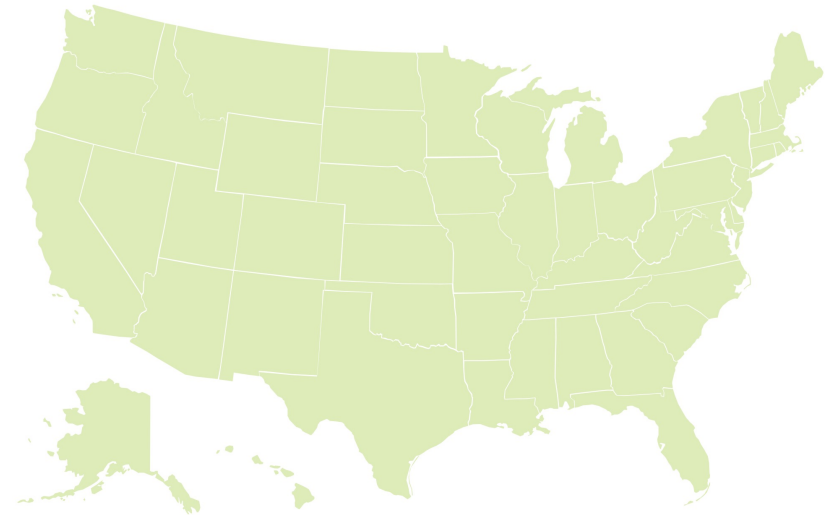
# *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models*

# National Forum on Education Statistics

**Mission:** To plan, recommend, and develop education data resources that support local, state, and national efforts to improve prekindergarten through secondary education throughout the United States.

## **Members:**

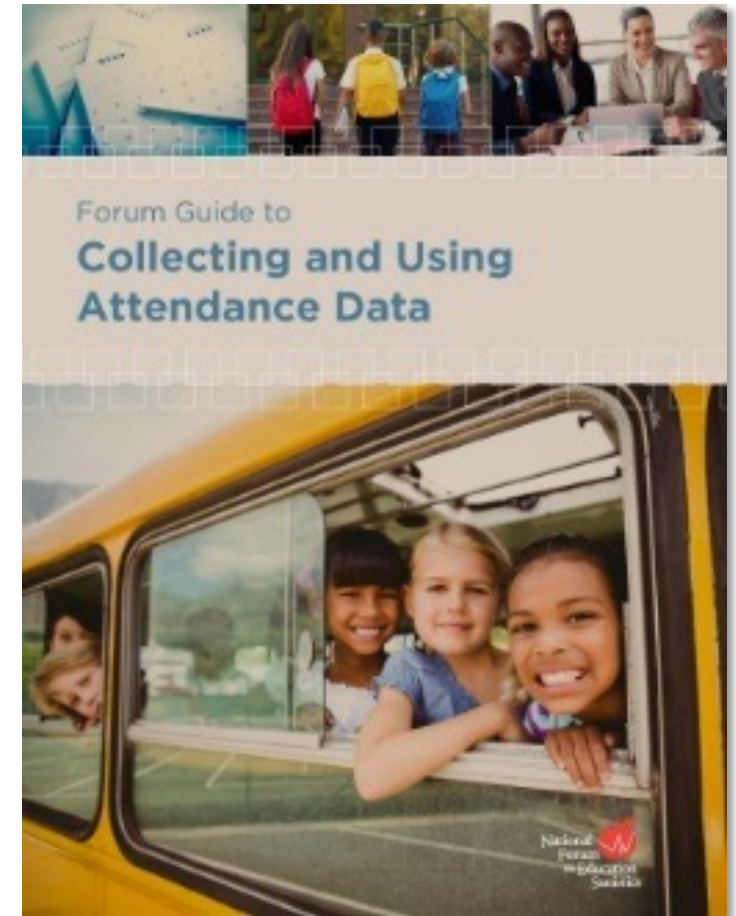
- Representatives of offices of the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies
- Representatives of state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs)
- Associate members from U.S. territories, Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), and national education associations





# Working Group Motivation

- Build upon the 2018 *Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data*.
- Develop a new resource that illustrates how SEAs and LEAs have operationally defined and are collecting data on attendance, engagement, and participation during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.
- Highlight the current practices of SEAs and LEAs.



2018 Forum Guide

# Purpose, Goal, and Audience

**Purpose:** To highlight how SEAs and LEAs have operationally defined attendance, participation, and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the means they may be using to collect each.

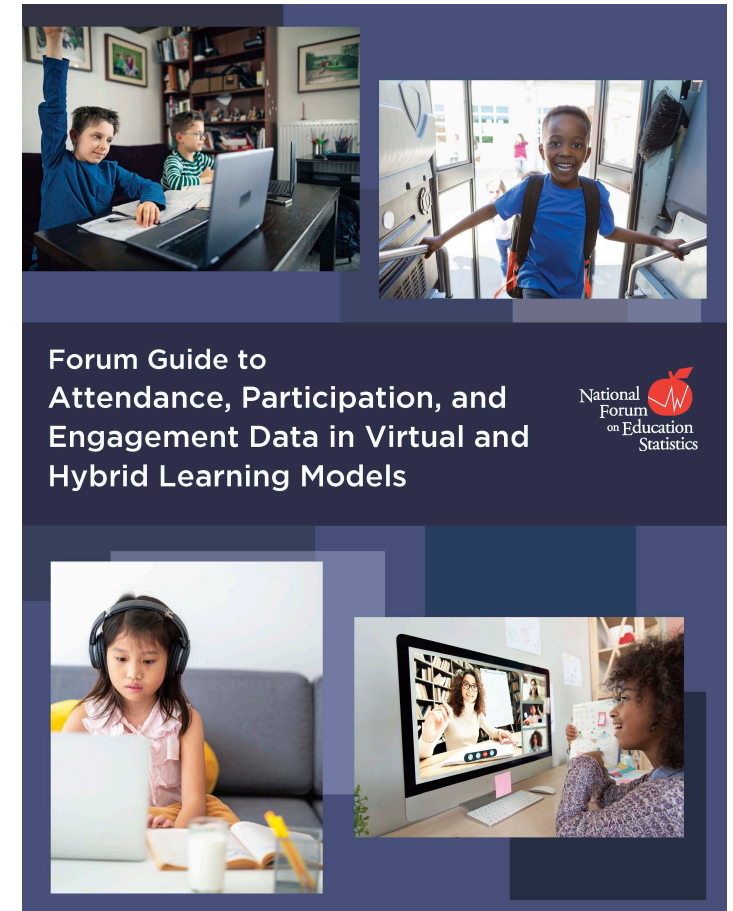
**Goal:** To assist agencies in responding to the current need for these data, as well as future scenarios, such as when natural disasters or crisis situations require extended virtual education.

**Audience:** Education agency leadership and staff whose responsibilities include any aspect of collecting, reporting, or using student data related to attendance, participation, or engagement.

# *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models*

## Chapters

1. Introduction
2. Attendance, Participation, and Engagement in Different Learning Models
3. Seat Time and Standards-Based Progression
4. Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Policies and Decisionmaking
5. Case Studies from States and Districts





# Chapter 1: Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the way that many SEAs and LEAs collect attendance data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many LEAs across the country moved—at least temporarily—to virtual learning for most or all of their students. The widespread use of virtual learning increased the need for attendance data showing that students can access their lessons remotely. At the same time, this widespread use complicated the duty of educators to collect attendance data.

# Key Definitions

- Students are considered in **attendance**, or “present,” if they are attending an instructional program approved by the state, district, and/or school.
- Student **participation** is defined as involvement of students in activities related directly or indirectly to their schoolwork.
- Student **engagement** is characterized by meaningful involvement by learners in their own education or training.

# Attendance Measures for In-Person Models

Attendance in traditional, face-to-face settings is typically measured by the number of days and/or periods a student is present in the physical classroom.





# Attendance Measures for Virtual Models

- A variety of approaches are used to measure attendance in virtual settings:
  - Minutes of instruction
  - Time logged in
  - Performance on assessments
  - Competency achievement
  - Other factors, or a combination of two or more factors



# Chapter Two: Attendance, Participation, and Engagement in Different Learning Models

Different attendance measures have been used by agencies to provide different levels of detail, and some of these measures also may be considered measures of participation or engagement when collected accurately. This chapter examines how attendance, participation, and engagement data are collected in different learning models, including various types of blended, or hybrid, models, as well as virtual models (including synchronous or asynchronous learning).

# Different Virtual Education Learning Models

- **Synchronous:** Content is taught to a group of students who participate at a specified time and learn at the same time, but without a shared physical presence.
- **Asynchronous:** Students access course section instruction and materials, and complete assignments at their convenience by agreed-upon deadlines.
- **Combined:** Asynchronous activities with periodic synchronous activities such as live online discussions and chats, webinars (online seminars), or videoconferencing sessions.



# Examples of SEA Learning Models During the COVID-19 Pandemic

SEA	Learning Model in School Year (SY) 2020-21
Arkansas	LEAs used a range of models.
Colorado	Varied between all virtual, all in-person, and hybrid models based on LEA's circumstances and COVID-19 rates.
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	Virtual with synchronous and asynchronous instruction, with some "face-to-face" learning provided to students who needed that accommodation.
Guam	Three options in fall 2020: Virtual learning, remote learning (hard copy pick-up and drop off), and hybrid learning (a mix of virtual learning and hard copy). In spring 2021, schools were open for in-person learning, but only 34% of students chose this model; the rest remained online.
Hawaii	In-person for high-need students; all others were virtual.
Iowa	LEAs varied among in-person, virtual, and hybrid models. LEAs were required to provide at least 50% in-person instruction, but could apply for a waiver for two weeks if certain conditions were met.
Maine	All LEAs have the option to go virtual at any time. Many LEAs have chosen a hybrid model even when their county has a relatively low risk of COVID-19 spread.
Minnesota	LEAs used multiple models and submitted them to the SEA for approval.

# Examples of LEA Learning Models During the COVID-19 Pandemic

LEA	Learning Model in SY 2020-21
Bossier Parish Schools (LA)	Began with multiple options: all virtual for any grade; grades PK-5 in-person; and grades 6-12 with rotating cohorts between in-person and virtual. Transitioned either all in-person or all virtual, based on parent decision.
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (AK)	Began with virtual education. Phased in to in-person, with students in special education, high-need students, and those with connectivity issues coming back first.
Jefferson County Public Schools (KY)	All students began virtual. Plans call for phase-in to in-person learning later in the spring starting with elementary and then moving to middle and high school levels. Parents would have the option to remain virtual.
Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)	Started as all virtual; began phasing in to in-person starting with elementary and moving up. Parents could choose to remain virtual for the SY.
Saint Louis Public Schools (MO)	All virtual during the 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter; on-site facilitators at 18 locations provided to families and students needing special assistance. After the 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter, families can choose between virtual or some in-person learning.

# Collecting Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Multiple options, including, but not limited to:

- counting all students as present;
- counting check-ins (such as phone calls, online meeting attendance, or turning in work);
- tracking participation or engagement in addition to or instead of attendance; and
- creating new or more granular attendance and absence codes (for example, blended learning code, non-engagement code, and mandated quarantine code).



# Examples of SEA Attendance Data Collection Procedures During the COVID-19 Pandemic

SEA	Data Collection Procedures
Arkansas	Attendance collection has not changed, although teachers are responsible for entering the data into the LEA's system.
Colorado	Individual LEAs decide the process.
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	Teachers take attendance when students are on campus and make updates on attendance for asynchronous days as assignments are submitted. Data are sent to the student information system (SIS), processed into the database, and can be used to generate reports.
Guam	Teachers record and submit the data to school administration.
Hawaii	Data collected by the Office of Strategy, Innovation and Performance from the SIS or manual collection through a template.
Iowa	Individual LEAs decide the process.
Maine	The state-level quarterly attendance data collection and definition of attendance have not changed. LEAs determine locally how attendance will be taken.
Minnesota	Working on establishing processes (as of fall 2020).

# Examples of LEA Attendance Data Collection Procedures During the COVID-19 Pandemic

LEA	Learning Model in SY 2020-21
Bossier Parish Schools (LA)	On their virtual day(s), students self-report attendance via the SIS portal.
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (AK)	Based on state guidance, LEA collects attendance as usual for in-person learning, and all enrolled students are considered present during remote learning.
Jefferson County Public Schools (KY)	Teachers record in SIS.
Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)	Login data from the learning management system (LMS) for virtual students, and regular period attendance for those in-person.
Saint Louis Public Schools (MO)	Teachers record absences in the SIS, as they would prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Student support teams follow up with those students who have not logged in on a regular basis.

# Chapter Three: Seat Time and Standards-Based Progression

Traditional definitions of attendance, and related data collection methods, have focused on the concept of “seat time”—the presence of the student in a classroom or school activity. Though requirements may vary—for example, LEAs may require different numbers of hours of “seat time” in a school day for students to be considered present—the data point is binary, in that a student is classified as either present or absent. In recent years, many LEAs and schools have moved toward models of standards-based progression rather than a singular focus on seat time. Under a standards-based model, students are expected to reach defined standards and succeed in particular tasks before moving on to additional lessons.



# Seat Time

- A binary count of whether a student is present in or absent from a classroom or school activity.
- All students move through a unit or lesson on the same calendar.
- Data do not give information about student engagement or progression.



# Standards-Based Progression

- Students are expected to reach defined standards and succeed in tasks before progression.
- Students move through learning content at different rates depending on their abilities.
- Data provide educators with more information about students' learning and academic progress.



# Seat Time and Standards-Based Progression

- Time-based attendance measures may sometimes be unsuitable in virtual education settings.
- Using seat time for in-person attendance and standards-based progression for virtual attendance could result in more stringent requirements for the latter.



# Chapter Four: Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Policies and Decisionmaking

For most of the history of U.S. public education, the connection between student attendance and learning seemed clear: A missed school day was a lost opportunity for students to learn. However, rapid changes during the COVID-19 pandemic raised questions about the concepts of attendance, participation, and engagement, and how these different aspects of student learning may differentially affect achievement.

# Challenges in Collecting and Using Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data

- Technical challenges with SISs and LMSs
- Lack of clarity around data for different learning models
- Data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic will not be comparable
- Need for clear communication with parents and students
- Technical or security impediments to contacting students
- Coordination of student data across multiple systems
- Consistency in data definitions
- Using data to identify struggling students

# Issue in Focus: Making Data Decisions for Early Warning Systems (EWSs)

- One of the key data points in a typical EWS is student attendance.
- Changes to attendance data collection may affect EWS functionality.
- In Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (AK), the EWS with static risk levels has been adjusted to use the attendance rate in SY 2019-2020. Caution is needed when using the “live” EWS because current attendance data reflect 100 percent attendance during remote learning.
- In Jefferson County Public Schools (KY), the SEA’s EWS will be adjusted to include participation (rather than attendance) data where applicable.

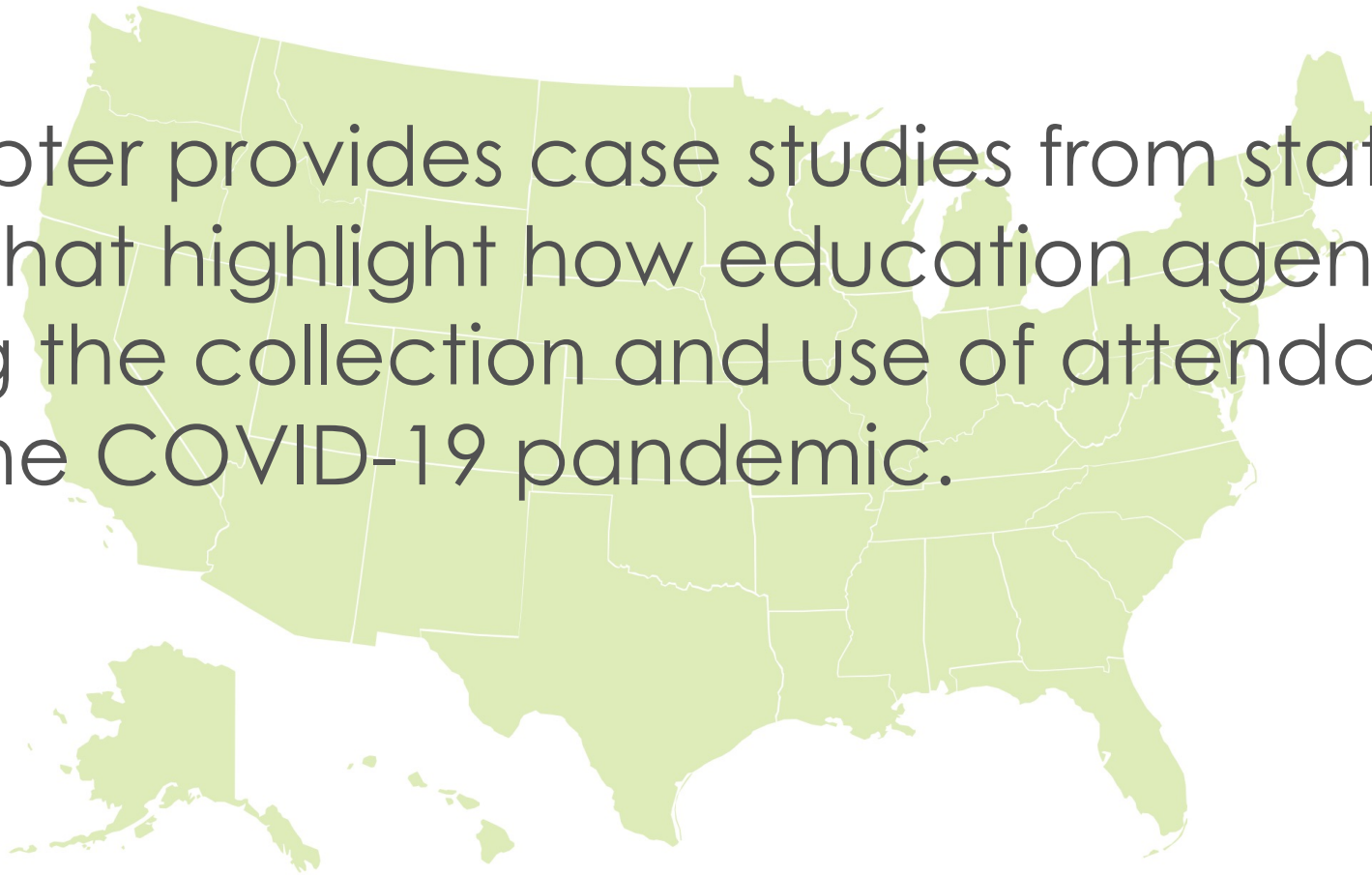


# Lessons Learned

- Agencies are reconsidering the meaning and relevance of attendance data and thinking more deeply about how to define and collect these data in ways that more accurately reflect student engagement and achievement.
- The need for widely available virtual learning led to crucial improvements in technology and communication with stakeholders.
- Teachers, administrators, students, and parents have come together in myriad collaborative ways to ensure that quality learning still can take place even when the delivery of lessons may have radically changed.

# Chapter 5: Case Studies From States and Districts

This chapter provides case studies from states and districts that highlight how education agencies are handling the collection and use of attendance data during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Attendance, Participation, and Engagement: Case Studies from SEAs and LEAs

## **Hawaii State Department of Education**

Throughout the fall 2020 semester, data collection for attendance, as well as various aspects of student learning, varied by complex area, school, and individual teachers. Later, the data team added an identifier to each student's record to indicate which learning model they are operating under, and schools have been able to define what “present” means for each model.

## **Iowa Department of Education**

As Iowa's LEAs have moved among different learning models, the SEA has provided guidance for tracking and recording attendance while remaining committed to allowing flexibility at the local level. SEA guidance notes that for any day that is counted as an instructional day, attendance must be collected and recorded consistently within the LEA. The SEA has not mandated which people (such as teachers or students) must collect or report the data, instead requiring only that the data be entered into the SIS.



# Attendance, Participation, and Engagement: Case Studies from SEAs and LEAs

## **Bossier Parish Schools (LA)**

In the absence of state policy updates regarding attendance reporting, the LEA operated under the previously established policy, in which students are marked either present or absent for any enrolled school day. Attendance definitions are codified in state legislation, but there is not currently a modified attendance definition for virtual education. Based on guidance from a state committee, the LEA is following policies regarding student “contacts,” which include new data elements and expectations for daily contact between teachers and students.

## **Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (AK)**

When schools in the state became virtual, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development decided that LEAs should follow the attendance data collection policies of correspondence schools in the state, which consider enrolled students to be in full attendance. Therefore, the LEA recorded 100 percent attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the LEA began phasing students back into varied levels of in-person learning, district leaders worked on how to best collect attendance data for students in different learning models.

# Attendance, Participation, and Engagement: Case Studies from SEAs and LEAs

## **Jefferson County Public Schools (KY)**

For SY 2020-21, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) required districts and schools to record participation for all students in lieu of recording attendance and has provided guidance about how to record participation. The SIS used to track attendance and participation data is managed by KDE and used across the state by all Kentucky public school districts. New data elements were introduced to track hybrid learning models.

## **Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)**

Traditionally, the LEA takes daily attendance (by day for elementary students and by each class period for middle and high school students), and students must be present for at least 3.5 hours to be counted as present for the day. In the virtual model, attendance data are not based on minutes of participation; virtual student attendance is measured by reviewing login and student activity data stored in the LMS used to deliver instruction.

# Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Working Group

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# Forum Resources

*Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models* [https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub\\_2021058.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2021058.asp)

For more information about the Forum, please visit

<https://nces.ed.gov/forum/index.asp>

For more questions about Forum publications and resources, contact Ghedam Bairu at [ghedam.bairu@ed.gov](mailto:ghedam.bairu@ed.gov).

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